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WATERWAYS TO EXPLORE

The Lake of the Woods

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To the many persons throughout the Lake of the Woods
district who through material assistance or information made
possible the compilation of this booklet. And most especially
to the friendly men and women engaged in the
tourist industry, and who annually are hosts to thousands of
vacation visitors to the Lake of the Woods.

Photos by Dan Gibson

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WATERWAYS TO EXPLORE

BOOK 3

The Lake of the Woods



Written by Mary Ainslie

FOR THE
ONTARIO DEPARTMENT OF TRAVEL AND PUBLICITY



*There's many a "Bambi" at northern resorts.
This one was as playful as a kitten.*

Foreword

It seems to me that without spending months, or even years, exploring the Lake of the Woods and its surroundings, no one could write the whole story of that vast, varied and endlessly inviting water. Each one who goes there will find a different lake. The blue, ruffled Bay at Kenora, where boats and planes buzz side by side; the crescent beach on Coney Island, too perfect to be real, where lazy bathers lie all day in the sun and gaze across to Keewatin; the big-lake look of the scene in front of Tunnell Island, where cruisers idle; and the little-lake look behind the rows of islands that keep a canoe ever guarded from wind and wave; the busy chug of sturdy tugs drawing great webs of logs to the mills; and the sudden jump back into another age, when a party of Indians paddles past—these are only a few of the many facets of that jewel of the north. All the well-known travel adjectives apply, and when added up and formed into sentences, inadequately describe the Lake of the Woods.

This is a land of extremes of every kind, so that to see it is to view a series of Kodachrome slides, each one the synthesis of what it portrays. It renders a challenge one moment, and sings a lullaby the next.

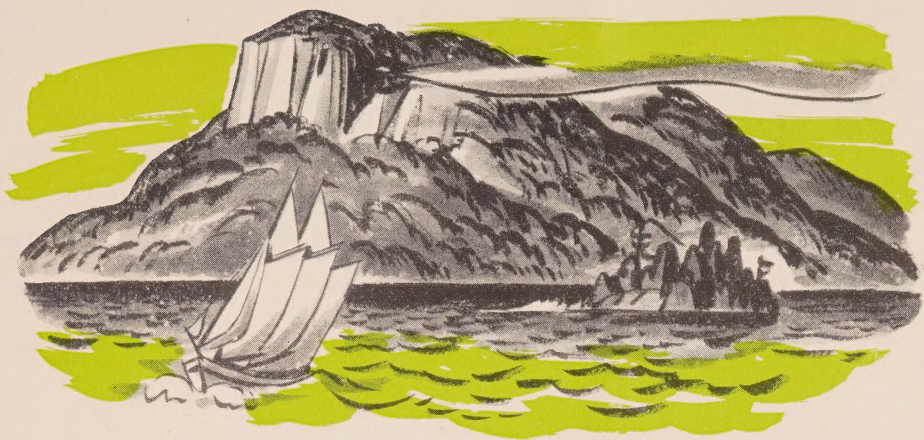
Though he wrote about the Dominion as a whole, Alexander McLachlan might very well have been describing specifically the great forest and lakeland around the Lake of the Woods, when he wrote, in his poem "Canada":

*Land of mighty lake and forest!
Where the winter's locks are hoarest;
Where the summer's leaf is greenest;
Where the winter's bite is keenest;
Where the autumn's leaf is searest,
And her parting smile the dearest;"*

• • • • •

*Thou are not a land of story;
Thou are not a land of glory;
No tradition, tale or song,
To thine ancient woods belong;
No long line of bards and sages
Looking to us down the ages;
No old heroes sweeping by,
To their warlike panoply;
Yet heroic deeds are done
Where no battle's lost or won—
In the cottage, in the woods,
In the lonely solitudes—
Pledges of affection given,
That will be redeemed in Heaven."*

My own explorations of the lovely lake were such as any summer visitor might make. Unscientific digging into history brought up as many fables as facts; and unorthodox wandering by yacht and canoe, station wagon and bus, not to mention airplane, all added up to a summer idyll of unforgettable delight.



I CAME to the Lake of the Woods from the east, travelling, in part at least, the Dawson Trail, an old Canadian colonization route laid out in the middle 19th Century to speed colonists on their way to the Red River Valley. But where pioneers had toiled in sailing vessels over Lake Superior, I relaxed on the decks of a luxurious Great Lakes liner. At Thunder Bay, on the Canadian Lakehead, where settlers' effects were laboriously transferred from sailing vessel to wagon, I walked in three minutes flat from ship to train, and a porter trundled my bags on a cart beside me. We rolled out of the station at Port Arthur and around the skirts of Mount McKay as if this ribbon of smooth steel had always been there. Not until our speeding train began to roar through rock cuts that at times leaned over our heads, did I begin to realize the hardships those early settlers endured to reach and settle western Canada. Hardwoods and evergreens seemed to struggle with the projecting rocks to see which would keep a foothold in a non-existent soil. Where one lake ended, another began, and sometimes sky and lake seemed to join in the distance. But along the right of way the wildflowers grew in as lush a display as I have ever seen in cultivated garden. The tiger lily, or a country cousin, streaked bright orange into a constant flash. Wild roses were piled bank on bank, a hedgerow gone rampant, pouring back into every gravel-pit bay that offered breathing room. A tall, spiky blue flower punctuated the pastel pink and the gaudy yellow. I wondered if these flowers grew there when the Indian held domain; or if the settlers had inadvertently dropped their carefully husbanded seeds, as they passed, and the blooms had sprung up to mark their path.

Here and there the train stopped at a small settlement or a wilderness camp. Bright-faced children and smiling women waved from the doors; and there was invariably a boat or two on the lake, and a man—undeniably



Riotous wildflowers are frequently identified as country cousins of more cultivated families.

a tourist!—fishing. Occasionally a proud angler raised his catch to show to the envious passengers. Fortunately for our train steward, there was fresh-caught fish in the diner that day!

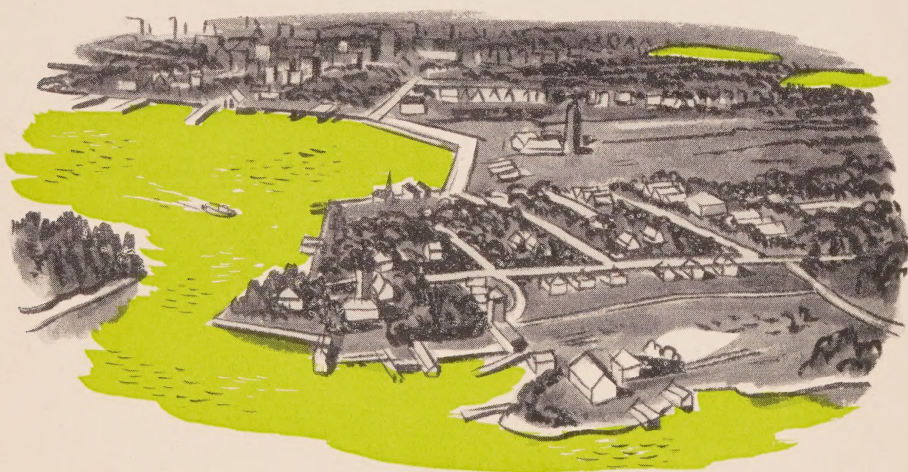
It was late afternoon when we reached Kenora, a charming little town that originally bore the unprepossessing name of Rat Portage. Nearly everyone who comes here immediately assumes that Kenora is an Indian word. However, this is one town that came by its name through careful thinking on the part of its original city fathers. In pioneer days the life of the northern part of the Lake of the Woods centred about the three outlets into the Winnipeg River. These, Archibald Blue describes in his "Tour of Inspection Through Northwestern Ontario," in 1895.

"There are three outlets from the lake which unite below to form the Winnipeg River—one near the west side . . . where Keewatin Village stands; one near the east side of the lake, close to the modern town of Rat Portage . . . and the third and largest in the middle . . . on which is the Witch's Cauldron, and the great dam recently completed by the Keewatin Power Company. The village of Norman, built on the island between the middle and western outlets, is now part of Rat Portage town, having been incorporated with it in 1892, but Keewatin has maintained an independent existence."

When the town of Kenora was incorporated in 1904, though Keewatin retained its separate identity, the name of the new town was formed from the first two letters of each of the three communities—Keewatin, Norman and Rat Portage.

Probably one of the most charming aspects about life in Kenora is that one can always watch someone else doing something interesting! Small commercial fishing boats chug in and out at the Government Dock. Airplanes of every variety, from little two-seaters to larger flying boats, drop down, unload and are off again into the blue. Indians glide along the shore in high-powered motor boats, and conversely, white men paddle bright canoes around the bay. Every few minutes a launch ties up at the dock and the general public assembles—to exchange camp gossip, in the case of boatmen, and to admire boats, fish, and gear in general, in the case of "greenhorns" like ourselves. Tourists and fish (very closely related, here!) are unloaded, and everyone repairs to the hotel veranda, there to stare at and discuss other tourists, or to shop along Main Street.

When we had finally had our share of observing this interesting traffic, we drove out towards Keewatin to watch the tugs drawing logs, and marvel at the carefree way in which the river men skip over the uncertain footing of the floating logs. It looks so easy when they do it!



Keewatin was the scene of the first flour mill in north-western Canada, the mill having been built at the insistence of Sir John Mather, about 1888. A shipment of Canadian grain had been frozen en route to England, and as a result, the reputation of Canadian wheat was suffering on the European market. The mill then established is now one of Canada's largest, turning out 1100 barrels a day. Keewatin also boasts five lumber mills in its immediate vicinity.

As at Kenora proper, water transportation is all-important. The rivers and lake carry the logs that make lumber, and they also provide the main attraction for the many tourists who are an increasingly vital source of revenue.

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Our first trip over the Lake of the Woods itself was by plane.

We swung around the town and had a good view of the three communities from which Kenora derives its name; then flew inland to see the airport for land-based planes. I asked if we had wheels, in case we wanted to land, and the pilot replied with considerable condescension (which I soon learned was common to all those who flew seaplanes): "Oh yes,—but we fly on floats. It's a nice port, though—for those fellows from the south."

It was not long until I discovered the reason for this supreme satisfaction with floats. The countryside is pitted with lakes—little lakes and big ones, round ones and long, thin ones—thousands of lakes!—and in two days of flying we saw only one on which the pilot did not believe he could land in case of an emergency. In the winter, the lakes freeze solid, (to a depth of two or three feet!) and the planes come in on skis.

Then we flew over the Lake of the Woods itself. 14,000 islands cannot be counted! Words cannot describe the way they look, except that they seem to float. There is no feeling that any land is solid land. The whole world is just islands, enchanted green dream islands, floating in water so clear that frequently we could look right down to the rocks and weed beds on the bottom as easily as we could look down through the spiky evergreen bush, at wild animals; and make a mental relief map from glimpses of bare hill-top and marshy valley.

On some of the islands were cottages, well hidden among the trees. Frequently we could spy a long string of a dock running out from an apparently uninhabited island, and knew that a cabin nestled there in the greenery. Dead centre on the highest point of one large island was a well-kept tennis court.

Down on Big Stone Bay we spied the shaft of an old mine, and learned the story of gold mining on the lake. Both here and at Clear Water Bay, gold and silver production played an important part in the development of industry, and in 1893 there were some 20 locations in the immediate

vicinity of Rat Portage, and a gold and silver reduction plant in the town itself. In this area were such famous and romantically christened mines as the Mikado, the Sultana, and Yum-Yum (someone knew Gilbert and Sullivan) and the more prosaically named Gold Star and Gold Reef. However, after the discovery of the rich Porcupine area, in northeastern Ontario, the energy and capital which had gone into their development were diverted to the newer camp, and most of the mines in the Lake of the Woods area closed down. It is understandable that the greater output of the eastern mines should induce this movement of capital; but as transportation facilities have improved, and shipping costs therefore diminished, the lower grade ore of the Lake of the Woods area, which is also free milling and therefore easier to reclaim, is a potential producer.

Farther south, along the Rainy Lake and River System, which forms the U.S.-Ontario boundary, copper has also been mined at Mine Centre. However, the newest mineral developments are farther "inland" from the lake itself—between the Lake of the Woods and Lake Superior, where the vast iron ore deposits of Atikokan are the basis for one of Ontario's greatest mineral developments. Thus, where the *coureur du bois* reaped a harvest of furs, and the pioneers made their fortunes from lumber, the modern settler is now finding a new wealth in mineral deposits.



*When the frost of autumn, nips the trees, still, and cold,
mirror the glowing hillsides.*

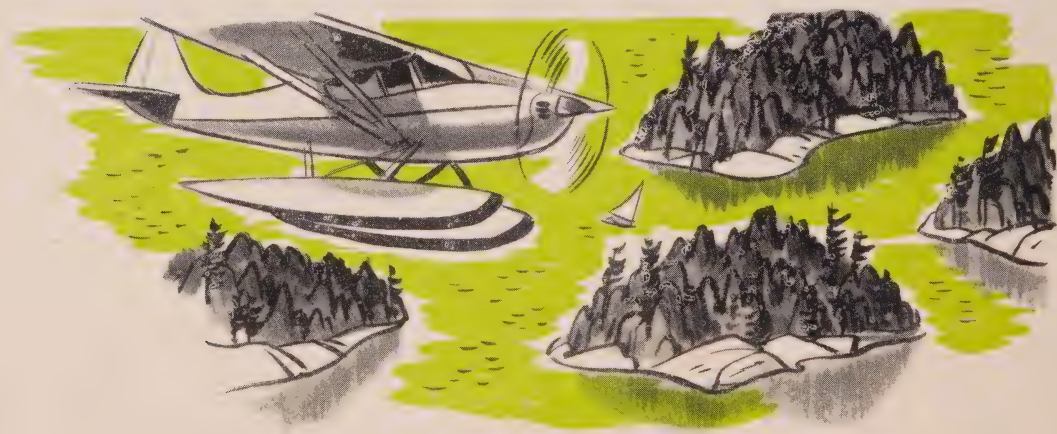
From this height one would expect to see the whole of the lake. However, at no time could we identify two opposite shores as mainland. The area of the Lake of the Woods is 1,485 square miles. This includes Shoal Lake, jutting out of the northwestern corner, and which has an area of 107 square miles in itself.

Lying as it does in a corner formed by the two Canadian provinces of Manitoba and Ontario, and the State of Minnesota, the Lake of the Woods occupies a position of rather unique international importance. It derives its water from a drainage basin which is 42% in the U.S.A. and 58% in Canada.

The principal drainage course is along the border in a northwesterly direction from an 1800-foot divide which lies only 15 miles west of Lake Superior. After leaving the Lake of the Woods, the waters flow down the Winnipeg River into Lake Winnipeg and thence into one of the largest drainage systems in the world—that of the Nelson River.

Canada has a slight advantage over its southern neighbour, in that 70% of the waters of the Lake of the Woods is Canadian territory. However, as if to balance this advantage, fate, in a rather humorous manner, donated to the U.S.A. a wedge of land 130 square miles in area, known as the Northwest Angle. This slice of land is intimately connected with early Canadian exploration and was the site of one of the first Hudson's Bay Company posts on Lake of the Woods. It is attached to the Province of Manitoba—yet, through lack of geographical knowledge, when U.S.A. and British authorities were originally setting the boundary it became a part of the State of Minnesota. At the close of the American Revolution, by the Treaty of Paris, the border was defined as running from the southern tip of the Lake of the Woods to the northwest tip, and from there “on a due west course to the River Mississippi.” Unfortunately, the signatories overlooked the fact that the Mississippi does not run that far north! After an accurate survey was made, however, the Northwest Angle was definitely listed as part of the U.S.A., though the boundary was not formally established until 1925.

As we dropped down over the lake and flew northward on an approximation of the international boundary, the pilot pointed out Massacre



Island and told the story of how the explorers came this way and how the island acquired its forbidding name.

In 1731, Pierre de la Verendrye was just beginning his explorations. With a party of 50 men, including three of his sons, he explored a new route via the Pigeon River and Rainy Lake to the Lake of the Woods. On the southern shores of the Northwest Angle Inlet, they built a fort and named it Fort St. Charles.

In the winter of 1735-6, supplies were running short, and since a long-expected relief party had not arrived, La Verendrye sent his eldest son and 20 men, including Father Jean Pierre Aulneau, to meet the party and hasten its arrival with the much-needed supplies. At the spot above which we were now flying, Sioux Indians intercepted, ambushed and slew the whole group. Some days later La Verendrye discovered the site of the slaughter, and the bodies were removed to Fort St. Charles for burial. The island where they died has been known as Massacre Island ever since, and has been shunned by white men and Indians alike.

The fort continued in use and was maintained as a trading post and base until the death of La Verendrye in 1794. Beyond that time there is only sketchy mention of it, in the notes of various explorers. Finally it must have been abandoned and fallen into disrepair and then to complete decay. The quick growth of the marshy low-lying inlet covered it completely, and eventually even the Indians did not know where it was. How it was discovered, and the ruins brought to light has been described

From east and west, and from the south, all roads converge on this northern land of lakes and islands.



Along the Dawson Trail, an army vehicle is called into use by modern explorers

by William H. Nicholas in his interesting story "Men, Moose, and Mink of the Northwest Angle," written for the National Geographic Magazine. In 1889, during a religious retreat being conducted by some Jesuit priests in the little village of La Vendee, France, an old man came forward and told the priests that he had a packet of old letters from one of his relatives who had been a Jesuit priest, and had been killed by savages in North America. These letters were eventually forwarded to the Jesuit fathers at St. Boniface College, near Winnipeg, and in 1890 the first attempt was made to locate the ruins of Fort St. Charles. The priests did find Massacre Island, but could discover no trace of Fort St. Charles. In 1902 another attempt was made, but without success. Finally in 1908 an organized expedition located and excavated the site. Bones of several of the murdered men were dug up from the ruins, and on the spot the priests erected a mound and a marker "Fort St. Charles, erected 1732, rediscovered 1908." The cross still stands on that lonely and deserted part of the shore.

As we flew over the vast Aulneau Peninsula, I reflected that at least the names of the brave explorers had been preserved to act as markers; and those who wrote memoirs or letters have left us that additional thread, fragile though it is, by which we may trace through the centuries, the devious course of the exploration of our country.

While the plane is ideal to give a comprehensive idea of the vast sweep of this region, it is not until one has explored it by water that it is really known. From the Lake of the Woods proper, there are countless waterways leading out to more and more adventure. The Rainy Lake and River System forms a gigantic chain on the southern boundary of Ontario, traversing Quetico Park and serving as an outlet for a network of other lakes over which a canoe may travel from Rainy Lake to Lake Superior.

North of the Quetico route, such lakes as Upper and Lower Manitou, Kaiarskons, Nora, Elsie and Clearwater splash a pattern of blue across



THE LAKE OF THE WOODS

Sitting on the front of the continent is the Lake of the Woods, the largest inland lake in North America. It is a beautiful lake, and its waters are the source of many of the best fish in the world.

The Indians called it Lake of the Woods, but the Europeans called it "La du Lac". It is the largest lake in the world, and its waters are the source of many of the best fish in the world.

There are few other lakes in the world like this. It is the largest lake in the world, and its waters are the source of many of the best fish in the world.

ONTARIO DEPARTMENT OF TRAVEL AND PUBLICITY
HARRISON BUILDINGS, TORONTO 2, ONTARIO

This map is a part of the "Map of the Lake of the Woods" series, which is available from the Ontario Department of Travel and Publicity. Source: Department of Natural Resources, Ottawa, Canada.

of the water in the lake, which flows on its way down the river, and the low and fertile lands are the source of many of the best fish in the world.

Used by the Indians as a water route to the north, the lake is the source of many of the best fish in the world, and its waters are the source of many of the best fish in the world.

There are few other lakes in the world like this. It is the largest lake in the world, and its waters are the source of many of the best fish in the world.

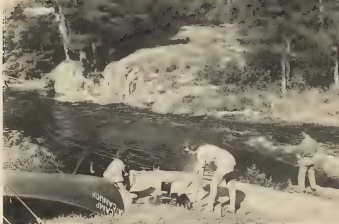
the map; and north again, Vermilion, Wabigoon and Minitaki skirt the transcontinental highway and provide doors to even deeper interior in the Drvden-Sioux Lookout area

It is impossible to deal with any one lake or river system, individually. Even so great a body of water as the Lake of the Woods itself is always only part of a network, utilized by the original Indians, and then by white men, to penetrate the continent. The first white man to leave a record of his trip from Lake Superior was Jacques deNoyon. In 1688 he travelled from where Fort William now stands, up the Kaministiquia River and via a network of lakes and streams to Rainy Lake, where he built a trading post. The following spring, he descended the Rainy River to Lake of the Woods

La Noue followed the same streams in 1717; but after La Verendrye's first explorations in 1731 (as described previously), the Kaministiquia seems to have been abandoned in favour of the Pigeon River. This latter route became known as the "Grande Portage" because it necessitated a "carry" of about 8½ miles from the level of Lake Superior at the mouth of the Pigeon River, up a rise of about 660 feet to the headwaters of the Rainy Lake system. The Grande Portage became popular to such an extent that the more northerly one was almost forgotten

Later, when the Grande Portage was found to be partly on U.S. soil, Edouard Umfreville was delegated to explore the country west of Lake Nipigon, and in 1798 he actually found a practicable route far to the north of the Lake of the Woods, via the Nipigon River and Lake Nipigon to the English and thence to the Winnipeg River. Where this route passes from

*From cottage, grand view from river, bangs the heavy report,
then from every lovely vista*



"Cool 'em or fast as they come out of the water!"

the English to the Winnipeg River, Umfreville Lake commemorates the achievement of this enterprising man

However, in the same year Robert McKenzie rediscovered the Kaministiquia route, and the northern one was never much used

A third historic canoe trail led from Lake Superior via the St. Louis River, Vermilion River and Lake Namakan; and another from the St. Louis through various waters to the Big Forks and down that river to Rainy River. These are still the favourite routes of vacationists as well as trappers and Indians, and every summer sees increasing numbers of modern explorers following the paths of the voyageurs

That a man had to be a man, on the canoe routes of the northwest is indicated in Hugh Johnston's "Account of Lake Superior." He points out that the Indians usually trotted across the portages, carrying canoes or heavy packs; and that sometimes the portages were two miles long, and packs weighed from 80 to 120 pounds! He continues that "He is not looked upon as a 'man' who cannot carry two." And adds with unconscious humour, "To the southward they use horses!"

As early as 1868, there was considerable discussion about the possibilities of canalizing lakes and rivers in the border area to provide cross-country navigation by water. This plan would have provided 350 miles

of unbroken navigation, approaching to within 25 miles of Lake Superior on the east, and on the west to within 90 miles of Fort Garry (Winnipeg). It was pointed out that all the lockage required would cost less than a railway of 200 miles from Lake Superior to Rainy Lake and that with a short rail line of 25 miles from Dog Lake to Thunder Bay, and 90 miles from Fort Garry to the Northwest Angle, the road to the Red River settlement would be complete.

The Canadian Government seems to have seriously contemplated the project, and in 1875 a lock was constructed at Fort Frances on the Rainy River. Although an independent company was also formed, to further the scheme, this, too, fell through; and the lock today remains as the only evidence of the plan. It is now in temporary use as a waste channel for the Ontario and Minnesota Power Company. With the construction of the C.N.R. between Port Arthur and Winnipeg, interest in a water route dwindled, and today this great chain of lakes and rivers remains very much as it was two centuries ago.

In 1912, Mr. George A. Ralph, drainage engineer for the State of Minnesota, pointing out the importance of maintaining the navigability of the Rainy River, wrote: "The Lake of the Woods will be recognized as one of the beauty spots of the continent . . . and it will be highly important to keep navigation open on the Rainy River as far as Fort Frances."

It was such foresighted people who managed to prevent water diversion which, as well as causing international difficulties, might have ruined the natural beauties of the area. While there have been minor arguments between the countries involved, the general picture has been one of co-operation, each having the other country's interests at heart. This was carried even to the extreme that Judge Cant of the Minnesota Supreme Court nullified a permit granted by the Secretary of War, May 19, 1910, to a company which wished to divert the waters of Birch Lake—to the detriment of Canadian rights. Judge Cant declared this permit void because it violated the provisions of the Webster-Ashburton treaty of 1842, "to ensure the common use and navigability of the waterways in question."

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When we took to canoes, our host, who operated a resort on the Lake of the Woods, all too thoughtfully gave us, as greenhorns, a huge, 17-foot craft. It required plenty of paddling, but rode well, even in a high wind. We explored the inner islands and several small adjoining lakes. At night we camped by a small falls where we could be almost certain of fish (two nice pickerel for breakfast) and where we would see other "voyageurs" portaging their boats, and packing their supplies across the narrow neck of land. One of the greatest joys of this exploration and outdoor living is to compare notes with fellow travellers, well-met along the way.

By day we cast leisurely along the shores and laid bets on who was most expert at choosing the proper spot for fish. The likeliest-looking weed beds sometimes proved disappointing, and quite unexpectedly a wide open expanse of water would bring us a strike. I came to the conclusion that "fish are where you find them." At any rate, we had them whenever we wanted, working on the principle of taking only what we could eat, and throwing everything else back.

By the second night, we had reached the stage of "experienced hands" (also blistered palms and sore shoulders). There is no satisfaction quite like that felt when one finally masters the art of carrying a heavy pack across a portage and staying on one's feet, instead of ending with all fours in air, firmly anchored to the earth-bound pack.

As day after day slips by, time seems to slow down. Yet it never drags. The minutes and hours of nothing but simple physical exercise are medicine to the soul; and the sunny northern air seeps into one's bones. To my mind, no visit to the Lake of the Woods is complete without a canoe trip. If you are too soft from city living, get a good guide and let him do the work—but by all means get in a canoe, away from roads, cars and crowds!

On our return to Kenora, we decided to travel by bus from Kenora to Fort Frances. The road skirts the eastern shore of the lake, and from its appearance on the map, must be built as much upon island and peninsula, as upon mainland. At any given moment there was water on both sides of the highway.

Half-way along the route, the bus pulls into Sioux Narrows, which lies between Regina Bay and Whitefish Bay. The Narrows was apparently named in commemoration of the ambush and massacre of a war party of Sioux Indians, one of the extremely few times when the Ojibways outwitted that famed tribe of warriors, and retaliated for their frequent slaughter of other, less aggressive tribes.

Today Sioux Narrows is a favourite resort spot. There are several large and luxurious fishing "camps" right at the roadside; and the docks are constantly busy with boats heading in and out as they service other resorts along the neighbouring shores.

*Fishermen know what wily monsters lurk in the weedy inlets
and the narrows between a myriad bays.*





The angler who can claim a lake trout like this one is a happy man indeed.

Southward again, is Nestor Falls, which could probably rate as the most photographed falls in northwestern Ontario. Practically everyone has fished or photographed at Nestor Falls! At this point the road skirts Sabaskong Bay, long famous with anglers, and scene of some of the earliest fishing camps on the Lake of the Woods. There are numerous resorts in the surrounding area.

From Nestor Falls to Fort Frances the road traverses a totally different kind of terrain than that encountered along the lake shore itself. Those who are interested in the geological history of North America will know that Lake of the Woods and Lake Winnipeg are remnants of the vast glacial Lake Agassiz which once covered Ontario, Minnesota, North Dakota, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. The northern shores are formed by the bare, glaciated rocks, and the southern shores by gently sloping drift left by the retreating glacier.

This accounts for the widely different physical characteristics of the northern and southern parts of the lake—so different that the Indians named the southern half “Lake of the Sand Hills,” as compared with the northern “Lake of Islands.”

A. C. Lawson, in his report on the Geology of the Lake of the Woods region, says: “The line of demarkation between these two naturally distinct portions of the lake is nearly coincident with the international boundary line from the Northwest Angle to the mouth of the Rainy River. Were that line to bend around so as to pass the southern extremity of Bigby Island and strike the main shore south of Little Grassy River, it would separate as nearly as possible the two portions of the lake thus characterized.”

The first settlement at Fort Frances seems to have grown up around the Hudson's Bay Company post which succeeded La Verendrye's Fort St. Pierre. It was rebuilt many years later and named Fort Frances in honour of the wife of Sir George Simpson, Governor of the Company. Another Hudson's Bay post at the lower end of Rainy River had the descriptive name of "Hungry Hall," while the post of the Northwest Company was known as Rainy Lake House or Fort Lac La Pluie.

Gradually such U.S. companies as the American Fur Company and the Stone Bostwick Company began to compete with the Hudson's Bay Company and the Northwest Company, and the rivalry grew into fairly heated disputes. The American Fur Company had several posts in the neighbourhood, notably one at the mouth of the Rainy River, and one at the mouth of the Warroad River. Indians also claimed that on the Namakan River, which was at one time regarded as something of a boundary line, the American Fur Company maintained a trading post on one shore while the Hudson's Bay Company was established on the other.

However, as American eyes began to turn more to the south and the west, the northern trade was gradually abandoned to the Hudson's Bay Company, and the rivalry died out. By the time that the border was settled, geographers and diplomats were able to do it amicably, and there have been no further disputes about the trade in this area. Today, Fort Frances and International Falls are twin towns of different nationalities; and like many other border communities, their economic and social life is freely intermingled.

The site of La Verendrye's fort has been converted into Pithers Point Park, and another park surrounds the old Hudson's Bay Company post.

Among the Indians, the Lake of the Woods was reputed to be a favourite haunt of the Manitou, their gods. These beliefs were fostered by the presence of strange, water-worn rocks and curious, polished stones that came to have religious significance to the wandering tribes. It was also a fertile hunting and fishing ground, and probably acquired further religious attributes from that fact. While early settlers reported that there were no deer, but many moose and caribou, deer have since become abundant. Moose are plentiful, and the area north of the Lake of the Woods is one of the few spots where caribou are still frequently seen. The sheltered bays of Shoal Lake, lying on the edge of the main prairie flights, provide excellent duck shooting. Bear are numerous and are particularly noted for their size. The more exotic side of the wildlife picture is represented by the turkey vulture and the cormorant, which are commonly seen here, though practically unknown in most other parts of the province.

The early explorers reported that the Lake of the Woods was the source of much of the fish which was the chief food of the Chippewa and Cree Indians. In 1733, La Verendrye's party wrote that they caught



From the roadside motorists stalk a deer drinking in a quiet bay.

"4000 big white fish, not to speak of trout, sturgeon, and other fish." Peter Grant, who was in charge of Rainy Lake House, describes a Chippewa Indian method of seine fishing which struck him as remarkably similar to the English system of dragnets. Another explorer, Paul Kane, who travelled across the continent in 1845, reported that for seven fine sturgeon, each weighing between forty and fifty pounds, he paid "one cotton shirt"! Apparently sport fishing had an early start, too. Blue's "Tour of Inspection in Northwestern Ontario," printed in 1895, reports . . . "we took up a party of excursionists from a fishing boat in a bay on the east side of the lake."

From about 1888 commercial fishing was fairly extensive, and the Lake of the Woods became renowned as one of the world's greatest caviar ponds, with caviar being shipped by both U.S. and Canadian firms to the European market. Soon commercial fishing grew to such extensive proportions that concern was felt at the rate at which the fish were being removed. In 1894 an examination of the lake was made by Professor Albert J. Woolman and Professor Ulysses O. Cox; and the International Fisheries Commission was entrusted with controlling operations because of the fact that these waters were contiguous to both Canada and the U.S.A.

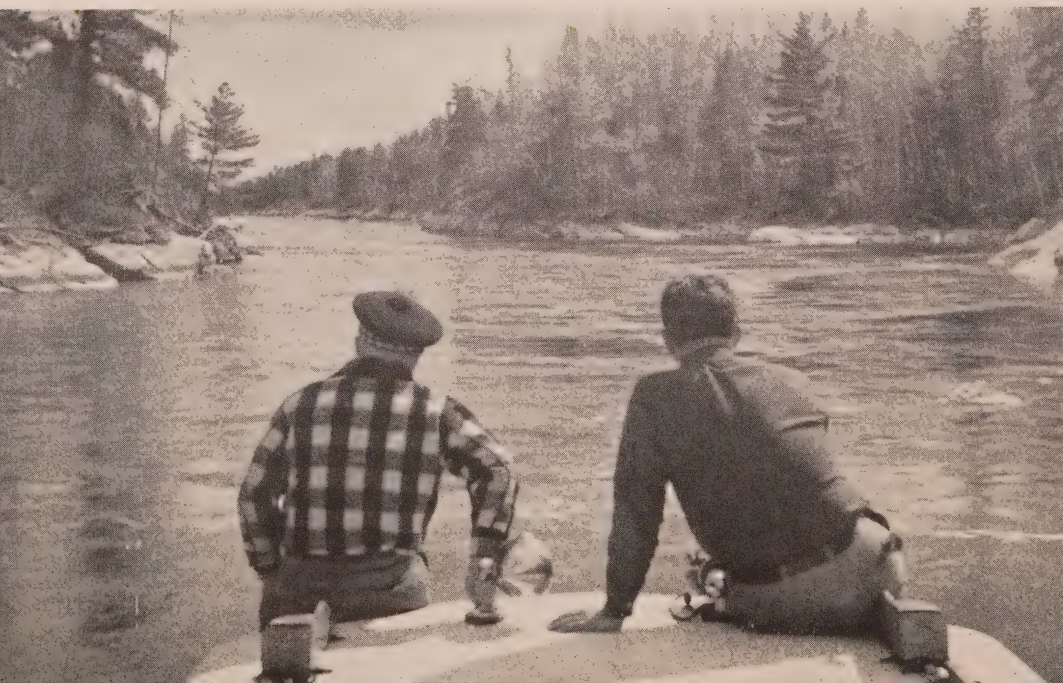
Commercial fishing operations still continue at both Warroad and Kenora, but game fish occupy the most important position in the fishing

economy of the Lake of the Woods today. The various types of fish advertised by resort owners in the area cover most of the species of game fish native to Ontario.

We caught walleyes frequently, and pike (Great Northern) at will. I was involved in many an argument with anglers of a certain type, who refer to the pike as a "snake," and are apparently accustomed to regarding him as a slimy, lifeless creature haunting bogs. The Great Northern, when taken from these cold fresh waters is a fighter par excellence. He hits a bait out of pure bad temper, fights the line out of plain devilment, and doesn't even give up when he's in the boat! The flesh is white and flaky, and has much the flavour of walleye. In fact we ate it frequently, rolled in batter, and some of my dinner companions—the same ones who were so disdainful of the "snake"—still think it was walleye. So when you go fishing in northern Ontario, scorn not the pike—give him your cheapest bait, because he may take it away from you—and your strongest tackle, because he is always ready for a battle! A really big pike can give you just as much of a tussle as most muskies!

Lake of the Woods has long been known as one of the world's outstanding muskie waters, and many of the resorts there were first established for the specific purpose of catering to those who wanted to do battle with the fresh-water tiger. Nearby Vermilion Lake has long been a prohibited area for anglers, and has acted as a natural hatchery for the Provincial Government; and Dinorwic, Sioux Lookout, Dryden and Eagle Lake are all in terrific muskie country. All these areas, of course, have the added attraction of bass, lake trout and pickerel.

Entering The Dalles, going "down north" on the Winnipeg River.



One evening we set out just to get bass. We were down in the Clear-water Bay area, idling along and casting into every little nook or where the rocks dropped off steeply into the water—these being my own ideas of where bass should be. But we weren't having any luck that evening. Plenty of northerns and a couple of walleyes tackled the bait, but we threw them back, and kept on trying for bass. Then we came abreast of a flat shelf-like rock on the shore. It seemed to run out into the water in the same formation, and I cast the little orange flatfish at it rather diffidently, with a vague notion that I might snag a rock just under water. For a second I thought I had done just that. It felt as if the bait stopped, I stopped, and the boat stopped! The one gigantic jump the fish gave convinced us that we had a topnotch bass on the line. And after what seemed an endless fight we had him on board—four and a half pounds of the best-looking bass I ever saw. I had my picture taken with that one, but like all coveted shots, it didn't turn out!

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Since the days of the Indian, water transportation in the Lake of the Woods area has evolved upwards, with changing times.

The fur traders introduced into this locality the famous "York Boat," named after York Factory, one of the principal posts of the Hudson's Bay Company on Hudson Bay. This craft was about 28 feet long, and was strong enough to carry heavy sail, and stand rough weather. It could transport 80 or 90 packs of about 90 pounds each, along with a crew of six men to work the sweeps which provided power, and a steersman. Many years later, lumbermen built another type of boat which has become synonymous with the north—the scow, first known on the Rainy River as "wannigan," probably an adaptation of the flat boat used in both Maine and New Brunswick, and known there as the "Wangan" or "Wangan Boat."

In 1871 the first steam vessels appeared on the Lake of the Woods. In notes about Fleming's overland expedition of 1872, it is recorded that the hulls of two steamers, each to measure over 100 feet, were being built at Fort Frances. These eventually transported immigrants from Fort Frances down Rainy River, stopped at Hungry Hall (perhaps this is when the Hudson's Bay post received its rather forbidding name!) and then crossed the Lake of the Woods to the Northwest Angle Inlet. From here the immigrants travelled overland via the Dawson Trail to Winnipeg.

We were not able to discover the names of these first two steamers, but in 1873 there appeared the "Lady of the Lake," a Government-built boat of 150 tons and with a draft of five feet. During low water, the sunken hull of this old boat may still be seen near the Keewatin Lumber Company stable on Norman Island. The first privately owned boat was the Speedwell, a much smaller craft, which plied between Fort Frances, Northwest Angle and Rat Portage and which was wrecked on Wiley's Reef in 1882.



However, from 1876 on, regular steamboat traffic was operated to Rat Portage Bay by a series of boats . . . the *Lily of the West*, the *N. Mosher*, and the *Lily McAuley*. By a strange coincidence, the *Mosher*, running on the same route as the *Speedwell*, was also wrecked, at the mouth of the *Rainy*, in 1885.

The "*Keenora*," believed to be the last boat which made regular trips between Kenora and Fort Frances, was later transferred to Lake Winnipeg where it is still being used on trips to Norway House.

Many of the older citizens of Kenora also remember numerous other boats which engaged in the traffic between Kenora, Fort Frances, and up *Rainy River* to Mine Centre—the *Swallow*, The *Shamrock*, The *Agwinde* and others. The trip from *Rainy River* to Rat Portage, a distance of 72 miles, took $9\frac{1}{2}$ hours.

To further explore the excursion possibilities of the lake, we took advantage of a modern addition to this fleet. On board the beautiful yacht, the *Grace Anne II* we cruised the sparkling blue waters, occasionally dropping in at an island to visit some magnificent summer cottage, or calling to see what was being caught at the resorts along the shore. Just before sundown we usually anchored in a cove and the whole party set out in small launches to look for fish, returning at 9, when darkness settled over the lake. Then a magnificent dinner was served, and in very short order everyone was in bed and asleep, lulled by the gentle motion of the boat, and dreaming of more fish to be caught in the morning.

We also enjoyed an attractive short cruise—that of the *Iris H.*, which runs daily from Kenora down the *Winnipeg River* to Minaki and Holst's Point. The launch churns along through the water trail that has changed very little since the Indians lived here. Along the shores, an occasional tent indicates a campsite, and canoe parties are constantly seen—the white men dressed as much like Indians as possible, and the Indians as much like white men!

As we were going down the *Winnipeg River*, we were much intrigued by the name "*The Dalles*" (pronounced "*Dolls*") which is applied to a picturesque rapids through which the boat must pass. In my research

In cold northern waters, the Great Northern Pike is a worthy adversary, and provides excellent eating.



reading on the subject, I discovered that there is another "Dalles." The second one is on the far west coast, on the Columbia River, and the U.S. explorers Lewis and Clark were guided to it in 1805 by a French Canadian voyageur, Toussaint Charbonneau. Since this man lived for some time with the Indians on the Upper Missouri, it is also possible that he travelled this far north, and named the two Dalles one for the other—though which was christened first no one knows.

The captain told us that in the early summer the water had been so high, and had roared through the Dalles at such a rate that boats could not go through, and passengers were forced to walk across a grassy narrows at a spot known as "White Dog Portage" and were picked up at the other side by the Minaki boat. By a strange coincidence, as we neared this portage, a large white terrier appeared on the bank, barking and howling frantically. As we passed down the river he followed us, over jagged rocks and through thickets and brush, running as far out on every point as he could, there to stand and whine with anticipation as the boat came nearer, and break into howls as it pulled away again. At last we were beyond the sound of this crying and he was just a white speck on a distant shore. I was almost afraid to ask the captain if the dog were real—perhaps I had just dreamed him there, because of the name. However, the captain assured me that I was not becoming fanciful. The dog belonged to a party of Indians who had been encamped at the portage all spring. Every time the boat came in, the captain had fed the white terrier, and the two had become quite fast friends. Then came the day when it was no longer necessary to walk across the portage; and another day when the Indians moved away to the berry fields. But the white dog stayed on, keeping his lonely watch, for all the world like the reincarnation of another white dog that gave the spot its name, but whose story has long since been forgotten.

The resorts about which life centres at Minaki and Holst's Point are a tribute to man's initiative and an indication of the lengths to which he will go to establish himself in luxury amid primitive surroundings. Here in the heart of the glacier-swept, rocky plateau, lies a gleaming green golf course, built by one of the world's foremost golf architects. I was told that the ccst ran into a figure ending in six noughts, and that thousands of tcns of earth were transported to the spot by rail. Knowing the terrain, I could accept this statement as without exaggeration. Nowhere else did I see earth enough to make a green, let alone a fairway! However, that the location was originally chosen for its intrinsic charm is evidenced by the fact that the Indian word "Minaki" means "The Beautiful Country."

The main Lodge itself is sumptuous, a huge log structure that blends beautifully into the landscape. Only when it first suddenly comes into view is one overcome by the enormity of man's fantasy, to build such an abode of luxury, in such a remote spot.

Here again, are the extremes for which the area is notable. Pretty girls in latest Hollywood fashions—men in dungarees; golfers and fishermen exchanging stories—speed boats and canoes—everything goes by opposites! Here one meets people from the not-too-distant mining towns along the railway, and from Trinidad and New Orleans and France . . . adventurers all, seeking and finding the health and peace of mind provided by a northern vacation.

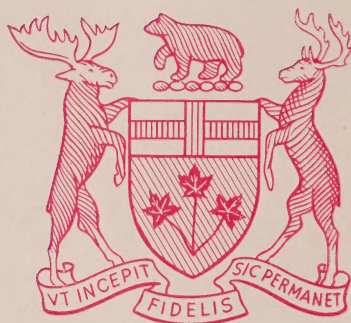
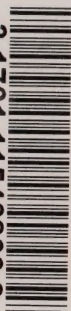
Even farther afield, we discovered another lodge set in the deep fastness of the English River, where every log was cut right on the site; where every bit of manufactured material used had to be flown in by plane, to the extent that the proprietor himself had dismantled a tractor, so that he would know how to put it together again, had flown the parts in to the camp, and there re-assembled the machine. As we lay on the beach, enjoying the sun and solitude, and watching the antics of a tame fawn playing with two puppies, we could hear the tractor cheerfully chugging away on the hill behind us, clearing a path to some new cabins . . . 60 miles north of the end of the road!

Such is man's love for crowds that he jams himself into cities of ten million persons; and such is his perverse desire for solitude that he will fly over half a continent to discover such a remote spot as this, where for a few days or weeks he can live in the very heart of nature.



When day is done, and the setting sun . . .

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WATERWAYS TO EXPLORE:

BOOK 1.....THE TRENT

BOOK 2.....THE RIDEAU LAKES

BOOK 3.....LAKE OF THE WOODS